Fray Diego de Landa — Relación de las Cosas de Yucatán, 1566

Order: Franciscan

Location: Mérida, Yucatán (Nueva España)

Preserved: Archivo General de Indias, Seville — Ms. Real Academia de la Historia, Madrid

Printed Edition: 1864, Ed. Brasseur de Bourbourg

> “They held and believed,” wrote the friar,
> “that there was one god, greater than all the others,
> who created heaven and earth, and that this god had no form,
> being invisible, incorporeal, and of the greatest perfection and purity.
> They named Him Hunab Ku, which means ‘the only living and true god.’”
>
> Landa confessed that this belief “astonished many among us,”
> since it seemed the Maya “had preserved the name and memory of the Creator,
> though corrupted by their lesser gods.”
> He concluded that “they did not lack knowledge of God,
> but rather lacked the grace of His revelation.”
>
> In later passages, Landa lamented that the zeal of the early missions
> had led to the burning of codices “that might have spoken of Him more purely.”

(Excerpted from Relación de las Cosas de Yucatán, Chapter V, folios 24–25.)

Archival Reference:

Fray Diego de Landa, Relación de las Cosas de Yucatán (1566), Cap. V, f.24–25.

Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia MS.

Two-Sentence Summary:

Landa’s chronicle records that the Maya worshiped a supreme, formless Creator named Hunab Ku, “the only living and true God,” centuries before Spanish contact.

His admission, preserved in an official Franciscan report, stands as one of the earliest Catholic acknowledgments that a monotheistic idea of God already existed in the Americas.

Subject Tags:

- Franciscan Missions — Colonial Yucatán
- Indigenous Monotheism — Maya Religion
- Catholic Encounter Records — Sixteenth Century